DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 363 973 EA 025 458

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TITLE Communication Skills: A Key to Caring, Collaboration, and Change.
PUB DATE Oct 93
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the University Council for Educational Administration (Houston, TX, October 29-31, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Education; *Administrator Effectiveness; Administrator Role; Communication (Thought Transfer); *Communication Skills; *Educational Administration; Group Dynamics; Higher Education; *Organizational Communication; Problem Solving

ABSTRACT

Communication is often identified as an essential aspect of leadership, an argument that is strongly supported by research on organizational change and leader effectiveness. This paper reviews that research and argues that this area of study should be formally addressed in teacher- and administrator-preparation programs. The paper also describes a university-based administrator-preparation program that incorporates the principles of experiential or problem-based learning and reflective practices to develop selected communication skills. The first instructional objective of the course is to help students learn to identify a problem. Next, the course concentrates on teaching new communication skills, such as listening, being assertive, and understanding group processes. A total of 17 students out of 34 responded to a questionnaire and evaluated the course positively. Conclusions are that: (1) communication skills can be developed as part of an administrative preparation program; and (2) the basic communication skills are important for educators. (LMI)

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Communication Skills:

A Key to Caring, Collaboration, and Change

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A Paper Presented at the Annual Conference of the University Council for Educational Administration, Houston, Texas, October 29-31, 1993

EA 025458

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Abstract

Communication is frequently identified as an essential aspect of leadership, an argument that is supported strongly by research regarding organizational change and leader effectiveness. This paper reviews that research and argues that this area of study should be formally addressed in preparation programs - for administrators and teachers. The paper also describes an on-going effort to develop selected communication skills as part of a university-based administrative preparation program that incorporates principles of experiential or problem-based learning and reflective practice.

Communication Skills:
A Key to Caring, Collaboration, and Change

The last few years have seen a growing interest in the reform of professional development programs (National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, 1987; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1989). We have heard the need for professional development schools to integrate theory and practice, to be more sensitive and responsive to the needs of the field, to attend to problems of practice. We have also seen calls to develop partnerships within the school community and between schools and the wide variety of agencies who are also concerned with children's well-being. Our ability to achieve the latter depends in part on our success in the former. That is, our ability to achieve essential reforms, to develop new ways of working together to achieve common goals, depends on our ability to identify core skills that are essential to effective leadership and to develop effective ways of teaching these key skills.

Two years ago, the Department of Administration and Policy Studies at Hofstra University, introduced a new program in educational administration. In contrast to traditional programs that offers a selection of discrete courses many of which focus on knowledge or skills in functional areas such as the building principalship, supervision, personnel management, or school law, the newly revised program consists of a sequence of required courses and internship experiences intended to address basic conceptual issues and skills of administration. The program begins with three core courses dealing with schools as organizational structures, human workplaces, and part of a complex social and political environment. In conjunction with internship experiences extending over three semester, students complete the program with two courses, the first in problem analysis and decision-making and the second in program planning and development.

Schools as Social Organizations: Working with People

The second course in the program, Schools As Social Organizations: Working with People, has the following objectives: 1) to develop knowledge of theory and research in the areas of motivation, interpersonal communication, and group process, 2) to develop competence in communication and group process skills. In addition, the syllabus proposes that students will be encouraged to examine their own attitudes and beliefs relative to formal theoretical perspectives; to explore the relationship between their beliefs and actions; and to critically assess the effectiveness of their actions in specific situations. In brief, one of the main purposes of the course is to enable the students to develop knowledge, skills, and a reflective perspective in the area of communication.

With respect to communication and group process skills, by the completion of the course, students are expected to understand and utilize reflective listening and descriptive feedback to provide critical information and resolve conflict situations. They are also expected to be able to organize and run planning, problem-solving, and decision-making meetings that address the socio-emotional and task needs of group members.

Consistent with administrative preparation guidelines (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 1993; National Commission for the Principalship, 1990), this generic course reflects the belief that schools are social organizations and that communication skills are central to effective leadership. As the course syllabus states,

> From the human resource perspective, the educational leader is one who can enable the members of an organization and its constituency to develop a cohesive mission or purpose, identify and resolve problems, and direct efforts toward the successful achievement of common goals. An effective leader, therefore, is one who understands the complex nature of interpersonal and group dynamics and is able to establish a climate of collaboration and cooperation within an organization characterized by diversity in age, gender, race, and culture.

Toward these objectives, the skill component of the course focuses on several discrete communication techniques. Specifically, students receive an introduction to listening skills, assertion techniques that rely on descriptive rather than prescriptive or evaluative feedback, and group leadership techniques whose objective is to create a climate of openness through a combined emphasis on task and feelings, safety and equity.

Research Justification

Although the rationale for this course was largely intuitive at the time, an examination of the research as well as experience with the impact of this course on performance in teaching and administrative settings suggests that these key communication skills play a critical role in determining the ultimate success of proposed school reforms, and specifically those reforms that address the need for understanding and cooperation.

The importance of communication skills for educators whether administrators or teachers is widely accepted. The need to teach communication skills as part of teacher and administrator preparation is a component of the platforms of national organizations such as National Association of Secondary and Elementary School Principals, NCATE, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and a recommendation for action growing out of research on school reform efforts (Fullan, 1991). Supporting its emphasis on communication, the National Commission for the Principalship (1990) cites John Gardner's statement: "If I had to name a single, all-purpose instrument of leadership it would be communication" (p. 14).

Given the nature of schools as people organizations, the logic of the argument is compelling; and the relationship between communication competence is well-documented in research on leader and organizational effectiveness in schools and other settings.

Communication, for example, is a foundation of transformational leadership. Transformational leaders are those who are able to create a culture of change. They are able to develop a shared sense of meaning and to develop a culture "built on norms of collegiality,

collaborative planning, and continuous improvement" (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990, p. 4). In transformational cultures, there is a great deal of communication, both horizontal and vertical. Based on their review of research about the strategies used by transformational leaders, Leithwood & Jantzi concluded that transformational leaders help build shared meaning, foster norms and beliefs about importance of collegiality, and encourage openness to new ideas and practices. They are comfortable with assessment and foster individual and group reflection. The researchers also found that school administrators who were able to influence school culture engaged in direct and frequent communication about cultural norms, values, and belief. They established collaborative decision-making procedures through which they shared power and responsibility with others, and they engaged in frequent and continuous evaluation.

Sagor (1991)and Murphy (1986) arrived at similar conclusions. Sagor found that transformational principals were able to establish a norm of inquiry and experimentation. They asked probing questions and acted as facilitators, providing information and support. generated a sense of openness, making it possible for teachers and staff to discuss problems and creating an atmosphere in which people were able and willing to pool ideas and resources. Murphy's study of effective school districts showed that superintendents engaged in frequent communication with principals, ranging from 45 to 875 visits per year and that these visits provided the opportunity for supervision and evaluation- much of which was informal and oral- as well as climate and team building. The study also found that communication was an objective of staff development in addition to curriculum and instruction.

In these situations, it is apparent that there is a great deal of communication taking place between administrators and staff and that communication is linked to improvement. In these organizations, people talk to one another, they share information, ideas; and they provide one another with critical feedback.

According to Barnard (1936), one of the most important functions of the administrator is to establish an effective communication system. If transformational leaders are able to do

that, if they are able to establish a high level of effective communication within the organization, how do they do it?

Analysis of the research yields a number of key skills. Effective leaders, and particularly transformational leaders, in schools and other organizations are expert in interpersonal communication and group process. While the process of communication is indeed complex and difficult (Jacobs, 1993), basically, communication involves an exchange of information or ideas: one person sends a message and the other person interprets the message as it was intended. An examination of the research suggests that skilled communicators are effective both in advocacy and inquiry. As advocates, they are able to present information about themselves and others. They are able to espouse their own opinions and provide critical feedback in a way that does not antagonize the listeners. They are also skilled in inquiry, the process of coming to understand the views, needs and feelings of others. They are careful listeners. Perhaps because of these skills, they are also skilled in group process and are able to engage others in collaborative problem analysis and decision-making.

In his review of change efforts, Fullan (1991) emphasizes the importance of skills of communication and collaboration. Effective principals were effective communicators: through frequent interactions with staff, they consulted, supported, reinforced, and monitored. They were able to work well with other members of the change team. A study by Hall (1988) concluded, as did Miles (1993), that the ability of the principal and others to work together as a change facilitating team was the important difference between success and failure. A study by Isherwood (1983) to determine how school heads in ten Canadian provinces related to interest and pressure groups, boards and chairs found that the most mentioned strategy was careful listening - to individuals and groups. The superintendents' effectiveness in a highly politicized environment depended on their ability to keep open channels of communication and to assess differences of opinion.

Studies of effective supervisors, corporate executives, and health educators also

emphasize the importance of active listening, descriptive feedback, and a collaborative approach to problem-solving. Miles (1993) reports on a study of seventeen New York based change agents that identified as key skills competence in reducing conflict, enhancing collaboration in interpersonal and group situations, and the ability to collect and feed back data. An interesting study by Jonas & Blumberg (1986) identified supervisory behaviors that contributed to positive teacher/supervisor relationships. Based on interviews and surveys, they concluded that the availability of the supervisor, physical and personal, and the supervisor's willingness to recognize teacher expertise were important behaviors that opened the door to supervisory communication. They also found a strong correlation between those behaviors leading to access (in Bolton's terms, attending skills) and behaviors associated with productive supervision, namely, active listening, immediate non-punitive feedback, and a collaborative approach to problem-solving. A similar study by Lyman (1987) found that sharing information, listening skills, feedback, and concern for the teacher were behaviors that enhanced trust in the supervisory process.

Studies in the corporate and public sector also confirm the importance of these communication skills. Glaser & Eblen (1986) interviewed top level administrators in 48 successful companies to document communication factors that organization leaders perceive to be important in the work setting. Respondents focused on verbal and non-verbal behaviors such as direct expression of information, opinion, and feeling; eye contact and smiles; giving and accepting constructive criticism; making others feel included, and the general ability to communicate ideas and to raise and discuss problems. Described as valuable managers were those able to paraphrase and feedback information to avoid misunderstanding and able to discuss problems and develop plans for change. They were able to give criticism without scolding or blaming and to gave critical information in an issue oriented way accepted by employees. Managers viewed as ineffective were those who criticized performance by personal attack, angry reprimands, or avoided correcting performance or those who allowed no latitude for

others to figure things out on their own, stifled input , or lacked patience or skills to solve problems through group decision process. The importance of listening for individual - and perhaps organizational-health is clearly illustrated in recent medical experiments where the life expectancy of terminal cancer patients involved in group therapy sessions doubled (Moyers, 1992).

Studies of problem solving processes of school administrators by Leithwood and colleagues found that expert principals and superintendents engaged others in the decision process and were effective in group process. Leithwood & Stager (1989) found, for example, that expert principals relied on high levels of consultation. They stressed careful information collection and valued consultation with others as means of arriving at a solution.

A similar study of problem-solving expertise among superintendents by Leithwood, Steinbach & Raun (1993) reached similar conclusions. Noting that the "forum for solving problems is increasingly the group or team", the researchers found that effective superintendents were skilled at group process. In working with groups, the superintendents tried to establish conditions necessary for group learning. They defined their role as one of facilitator and made sure everyone had an opportunity to participate by careful attention to body language, trying to understand and react to the needs of each individual, and by encouraging discussion to achieve clarity and consensus. In analyzing their own success, the superintendents most frequently identified self-reflection; summary, synthesis, and clarification; respect and courtesy; and ability to indicate one's own point of view without intimidating others. The authors concluded that group problem solving capacities are an important part of the repertoire of those who would be transformational leaders.

In their analysis of educational reform efforts in the last decades, Miles (1993) and Fullan (1991) also conclude that group process skills are key to change. Reviewing 40 years of school change efforts, Miles maintains that "change strategies weak in process analysis are quite likely to fail." In contrast, good process skills combined with data feedback, what Miles

describes as the main variable driving organizational development, contribute to the development of a shared perspective and increase the likelihood of change.

Developing Communication Skills

Communication skills are essential to administrators and to teachers as well. These skills of inquiry and assertion are very valuable and appear to contribute directly to organizational and leader effectiveness in a variety of ways. They are essential to organizational change and strongly related to effective supervision and expertise in problem solving and decision-making. In a general way, they are skills that engender trust and develop a climate that fosters collaboration (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1992). Yet these skills are not widely used.

In 1974, Argyris &Schon outlined their concepts of Model I and Model II. Contrasting sets of assumptions or beliefs about cause effect relations, these models shape behavior. While Model II behavior is guided by assumptions that support collaboration and cooperation, Model I is premised on the concept of unilateral control and self-protection. In Model I, the desire for control leads to withholding information. In contrast, in Model II, the belief that control can only be effective when it is achieved through collaborative means fosters an open flow of information and ideas. A person prompted by Model I assumptions will be less likely to discuss problems or share critical information with others, more likely to offer prescriptive rather than descriptive feedback, and more likely to engage in assertion than inquiry. In contrast, a person prompted by Model II assumptions will communicate openly and publicly test assumptions, emphasize common goals, and rely heavily on inquiry as well as assertion. In contrast to Model I behaviors that generate defensive patterns of behavior that preserve the status quo and block progress, Model II behaviors foster openness, trust, and consensus. Argyris and Schon argue that the open flow of information improves the quality of interpersonal relations, stimulates professional growth, and enhances organizational effectiveness. In Senge's (1990) terms, these behaviors are the foundation of the learning organization. Despite the benefits of Model II assumptions and strategies, Argyris and Schon (1974) maintained that

Model I was a pervasive pattern in modern organizations. Subsequently, that hypothesis has been reiterated and supported by organizational research (Argyris,1990; Senge, 1990) particularly in the area of supervision where open information and particularly descriptive feedback is critically needed and woefully lacking (Natriello, 1980; Blumberg, 1986; Rosenholtz,1989).

This pervasiveness of these patterns of communication becomes particularly evident and problematic in a course designed to develop Model II behaviors. While at one level, espoused theories are usually quite consistent with the stated assumptions: the necessity for open feedback and open communication, the need to insure equity, and to utilize collaborative approaches to problem-solving, the patterns of behavior typical of Model I are deeply engrained and provide strong resistance to the development of new skills.

Identifying a problem (or.., establishing a learning goal)

Because of this resistance rooted in deeply engrained assumptions or theories-in-use, the course relies heavily on reflective practice concepts. From this perspective, behavioral change takes place only when the learners recognize a problem with their own performance (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1992). Consequently, the first instructional objective is to develop a sense of problem. The problem-a discrepancy between the current situation and the goal-emerges through discussion and role plays that enable students to articulate their beliefs about effective practice (espoused theories) and to contrast those beliefs with actions and outcomes. For example, in discussions of supervision, classes maintain a firm belief that feedback-positive and critical-is essential for professional growth. Confronted with the need to engage in feedback in a structured role play situation, however, students soon realize that actions seldom conform to beliefs - an experience that heightens the salience of research that demonstrates both the need for and the neglect of critical feedback. When students observe this discrepancy and recognize that their typical strategies are not yielding the outcomes they intend, they are receptive to new techniques.

Teaching New Skills

Listening. For the next few weeks, the class focuses on discrete communication skills of listening and assertion outlined in Bolton (1979). Since communication is defined as a combination of verbal and nonverbal behaviors, the unit on listening covers three clusters of skills that Bolton describes as attending, following and reflecting. Students learn how their verbal and body language can convey a willingness to listen. They also learn techniques such as paraphrasing that clarify meaning and demonstrate the listener's understanding of the message that's being communicated.

The mode of instruction is primarily experiential and problem-based (Bridges, 1992). To develop listening skills, for example, students, acting as administrators, are confronted with a situation in which students or teachers, or parents are upset. The task of the administrator is to listen carefully in order to understand the situation from the perspective of the other person. If they listen carefully, they go beyond the symptoms to uncover a more fundamental problem that requires attention. As the role plays demonstrate, this is an exceedingly difficult task, particularly when the normal tendency is to talk rather than to listen, to present one's own insights and to infer rather than to explore the situation solely from the other's perspective.

Reflecting the importance of authenticity (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Prestine & LeGrand, 1991, Leithwood & Steinbach, 1992), role plays are structured around typical problems of practice. In addition, as students begin to experiment with the skills, they frequently bring in problems from their work settings and construct role plays for practice purposes.

While not usually described as a communication skill, observation skills are key to effective communication. Observation of non-verbal behavior clearly becomes a listening tool and skilled observers who are adept at gathering descriptive information are far more successful in explaining and defending their positions than those who lack data. These

observation skills are developed in several ways. Processing becomes an integral part of every class activity with distinctions between observation (what happened?) and interpretation (how did it affect me, others?) In addition, students must complete a formal observation of a meeting using standard techniques to diagram and record the frequency, flow, and content of discussions.

Assertion. The ability to listen is important; so is the ability to communicate one's own ideas in a clear and non-threatening way. To enable students to develop this skill, another instructional unit focuses on an assertion technique that utilizes descriptive feedback: the "I-message". The I-message is an extremely powerful technique that reflects and reinforces Model II assumptions and behaviors. Described widely in popular psychology and counseling literature, this technique requires a three-part statement that describes a problem or situation, the individual's feelings about the issue, and the reason for the concern. Because the statement reflects only one's own views and relies on description rather than criticism, blame, or prescription, the message is less likely to prompt defensive reactions or roadblocks and more likely to be heard by the recipient of the message. The use of this format also facilitates collaboration because it requires the speaker to frame the message in Model II language. By focusing solely on the problem and avoiding prescription, it becomes possible to develop a mutual understanding of the problem and then move into collaborative problem-solving. The technique, in essence, supports the attitudinal shift from individual control (Model I) to collaboration (Model II). This skill is critical in dealing with the myriad of interpersonal conflicts that arise in the daily life of the administrator or teacher and is essential for effective supervision and decision-making, particularly in organizations that are trying to move away from traditional patterns of interaction based on hierarchical authority rather than expertise and toward the use of collegial models of action.

As with the other discrete skills, students experiment with the techniques in class and in their home or work settings using presented or personal problems. Because it's difficult and uncomfortable using any new technique, students often begin experimentation in their family

settings.

The experimentation has two purposes: 1) to develop the skill and 2) to provide an opportunity to assess the technique's usefulness. The use of each of these techniques is usually accompanied by an Aha! reaction when, for example, the I-message yields a positive response and often a problem-resolution where previous efforts have failed, or when the observation activity leads to new insights and perspectives about the nature and effectiveness of interaction patterns. The reports on the experimentation take two forms: informal oral reports in class and a written description. Both provide the opportunity for reflective analysis and coaching.

At this point, having worked with the discrete skills, the class shifts to conflict resolution, a process that requires the integration of both listening and assertion skills. Again, structured class activities and field assignments provide time for experimentation, analysis, and reconceptualization.

Group Process. Listening and assertion skills are important for interpersonal communication and conflict resolution; they are also the keystones of effective group process. For the balance of the course, and for the three remaining courses of the program, much of the class work consists of team projects that will require students to use listening and assertion skills in the more complex and demanding context of group decision-making. The Interaction Method for organizing group meetings (Doyle & Straus, 1982) outlines three essential roles: the facilitator, group member, and recorder. In this course, an introduction to the process, the roles, and the assumptions underlying this and the traditionally defined group roles precedes an extended project.

Throughout the project, group members alternate roles and the groups set aside time at each meeting for process analysis. The instructor acts as observer and coach. Because of the pressure to complete the assignment, the conflict between espoused theories and theories-in-use becomes very evident. While the team may accept the idea that equitable participation is important, time pressures, differences in personality and expertise, provide a strong rationale

for falling back on established ways of doing business with the most expert or most assertive emerging as leader while other less vocal or assertive members participate less and gradually withdraw or reject the group.

Since effective group process requires attention to feelings as well as task, there is ample opportunity to use listening and descriptive feedback skills. But, again, the deeply-engrained assumptions make it very difficult for group members to speak openly about their concerns; and task concerns usually override and exclude attention to individual feelings or problems.

This is the most difficult part of the course and the integration of new behaviors is seldom smooth. Over time, however, more often as a result of failures, awareness increases and new behaviors begin to take hold by the end of the course. During the course, however, the level of frustration is extremely high; and students directly and profoundly experience both the intense difficulty and the rewards of team work. It's easy to talk about collaboration but extremely difficult to do it.

As the students are completing the project, they are also completing a written analysis of the group process, another assignment that demands both observation and reflective analysis.

Assessing Course Effectiveness

Three groups of students have taken the course since its introduction. A brief questionnaire distributed to graduates asked about the frequency with which they used these skills in teaching, administrative and intern situations. The respondents were also asked if the use of the techniques has improved their effectiveness and if the course was influential in the development of these skills?

Of the 34 questionnaires distributed, 17 were completed. Regarding frequency of use, the respondents rated each of four techniques on a scale of 0 to 5, never to very frequently. The mean scores for each technique are as follows: Reflective Listening, 4.35; Observation, 4.11; "I" Message, 3.7; and Meeting Skills, 4.00. With the exception of the I-message where 53%

reported frequent or very frequent use, in the other categories, from 76% to 88% of the respondents reported that they used each of the techniques frequently or very frequently.

Respondents also indicated the frequency with which they used these techniques in teaching, administrative, or intern settings. Of the seventeen respondents, 82% reported that they used the techniques in teaching, 65% in administration, and 76% in the internship. In each instance they reported a frequent use of the techniques with means of 4.21 in teaching, 4.18 in administration, and 3.92 in the internship.

In an open ended question regarding impact on their effectiveness, all respondents indicated that the techniques had improved their effectiveness and cited specific examples from their personal and/or professional lives including the following.

Listening

In describing their use of listening techniques, some respondents described using reflective listening in their work with students. One reported that reflective listening helps emotionally disturbed high school students to reframe and begin to solve their own problems. Other incidents describe teachers' success in dealing with discipline issues and in understanding student's questions and comprehension. Others describe their use of reflective listening in encounters with angry parents or depressed co-workers. "In one instance, I had asked a parent to come to school because her son was being suspended. When she arrived, she was very agitated. After a half hour of reflective listening, she left smiling. She even shook my hand and thanked me." Another described a confrontation with an angry parent in a similar way: "I purposely sat next to the parent instead of across from her, listened carefully and empathized to see where the parent's frustration lay. The meeting took well over 45 minutes, but we uncovered solutions to the problem and both felt good about the situation after the meeting."

Assertion

Respondents reported using the I-message in highly charged staff planning meetings, in family conflicts and in dealings with parents and colleagues. One described an emotionally

charged meeting that broke down into name calling and accusations. In utilizing the I-message, he attempted to personalize the situation and stated his disappointment in the direction in which the committee had turned. He then prompted discussion that eventually led committee members to own their behavior. Another enthusiastic response reported that the I-message had changed her life. Specifically, s/he noted that it helped her "immeasurably " during her internship "in dealing with everyone from the cafeteria aides to the principal. I am sure that had I not employed the I-message, many of the issues I faced could have led to disputes and misunderstandings."

Meeting Skills

As meeting leader or as group member, respondents report the value of observation and meeting techniques. As a substitute special education resource room teacher, a respondent was required to hold weekly team meetings. After a few "disasters" "with time getting away and no issues being resolved" she began to organize the meeting more carefully by clearly defining objectives and providing everyone with an opportunity for input. Another student used the Interaction Method to reactivate and motivate a community organization. In less than 6 months, the structured techniques changed the nature of the meetings from gripe sessions to productive planning and decision-making sessions. As a result, the group was able to expand its active membership and implement a full social action agenda. Another spoke of chairing a volatile School Tone Committee. She designated a recorder to insure that the minutes would not reflect one person's slant on the issues and restructured the meetings in order to improve the atmosphere- making it less hostile and more cooperatives. She did so by "creating a non-judgmental setting where brainstorming and resolving all differences by consensus were the standards." Often these efforts are recognized and applauded by colleagues and supervisors. In this instance, for example, the principal commented on the teacher-intern's skill in working with the group and in generating substantive recommendations (unlike other similar work groups). In another instance, an intern reported that her knowledge and use of conflict

resolution techniques in her own work setting so impressed an interviewing team that she was offered a supervisory position.

All respondents indicated that the course had helped them to develop these skills and many focused on the importance of reading and role plays for skill development and as a reflective stimulus. "Both of these learning tools were extremely important... I found myself relating to situations or behaviors described in the readings after having role played or having reflected on my past experiences. The books made me more cognizant of my past and present communication style when dealing with individuals and groups. This course allowed me to critically examine my communication patterns and effectiveness. It provided me with scientifically documented ways to change my style or approach so as to be an effective communicator."

In general comments about the course, respondents commented that they are now more aware of themselves and others and able to work better with people. "Observation helps because now I pay close attention to how administrators facilitate meetings." "These techniques enhanced my job performance by providing me with skills necessary to clarify the task at hand, identify underlying issues, and more importantly, affirm the value of each person's contribution to the task at hand as well as the workplace in general. I was able to depersonalize issues and focus on a meaningful agenda." "When I began the course I was working in an organization in which communication was awful...With the help of the techniques learned in this course, I was able to change and improve my own communication and therefore make my participation in this organization more bearable."

Others commented that the course has improved the way that they deal with other people: "I've learned to be a better listener, and realize the need to be sensitive with people." "I feel it has made me a better communicator, by speaking 'with' people, especially students, instead of 'to' them." "These techniques have proven to be useful in understanding others and in relaxing them enough so that they are free to express themselves."

Although the comments on the course and its effect are positive, the most rewarding comments refer to the students' continuing efforts to improve their skills. The majority describe the course as only the beginning of a developmental process. Many reported that they refer back to the basic texts and describe their continuing awareness to their own communication styles and their struggle to improve their effectiveness. As one reports "I'm developing my techniques, particularly in working on running effective meetings and understanding each person's role and feelings in a group, observing body language, working through conflict. The course made me more aware."

Conclusions

The experience of the students in this course suggests several conclusions. One is that communication skills can be developed as part of an administrative preparation program and that outcomes can be detected in the form of knowledge, skills, and the reflective perspective that provides the basis for lifelong learning and personal mastery. The second is that the basic communication skills developed are indeed important for educators. The skills are immediately applicable in their work settings and serve as tools to enable these prospective educational leaders to work in more effective and collaborative ways with others whether students, parents, or colleagues.

Argyris (1990) argues that patterns of communication typically employed by individuals in organizations generate defensive patterns of behavior that preserve the status quo and block progress. When individuals and organizations rely on Model I forms of communication, underlying assumptions remain hidden and unchallenged; problems remain unexamined and superficially addressed; and the trust essential to effective cooperation between individuals and groups does not develop. Unless these hierarchical and non-productive forms of communication are changed, it is unlikely that imposing cooperative structures will result in any real improvement. Unless educational leaders develop new and more effective communication skills, it will be difficult to establish collaborative relationships among diverse

groups and facilitate progress towards educational and social goals.

There are key communication skills that change the nature of the relationship between and among communicators. Just as Model I communication patterns preserve hierarchical relationships, a combination of listening and assertion skills that rely heavily on observation and descriptive feedback restructure the nature of communication from predominantly vertical, hierarchical, and unidirectional patterns to horizontal, collaborative and dialogic patterns. Both sets of skills, listening and assertion, are closely interdependent and separately and together, as a review of the research demonstrates, can be linked to effective problem-solving, decision-making, and individual and organizational change through their impact on awareness, analysis, trust, and consensus.

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